

Interview with Carole Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF.

“We are supporting 63 projects in education”

Education Forum: What specific activities and initiatives have been undertaken by your institution in the last ten years to support the fundamental educational needs of children, teenagers and adults?

Carole Bellamy: We have increased our budgets, staff capacity, and programmes in education. We have also increased our focus on more integrated, comprehensive care for young children, education for working children and children in conflict, and, above all, on the education of girls.

An up-to-date thumbnail sketch of some 63 ongoing UNICEF-generated or supported education projects aimed mainly at girls can be found at <http://www.unicef.org/efased.htm>.

EF: What major challenges has your organisation faced in trying to promote Education for All?

CB: The biggest challenge have been the unforeseen barriers put up in the 1990s – poverty resulting from a combination of economic crises, the weight of debt on the poorest nations and declines in development assistance. There is also the devastating rise of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Unforeseen emergencies, natural and human-made, that literally destroyed entire education infrastructures, and a drastic increase in the number of disruptive armed conflicts in which children and women were the principal victims.

EF: What major innovation should be introduced in the Dakar Framework of Action to ensure that EFA becomes a reality by year 2015?

CB: No one innovation will do the job. The biggest post-Dakar need will be the mobilisation of genuine will on the part of those who can facilitate Education for All. Perhaps the biggest challenge after Dakar will be one of building strong partnerships. We cannot assume that the initiative lies only with those on the donor-NGO-IGO and governmental side. After Dakar we are hopeful that all will recognise that the poor and children themselves are the true protagonists of change in their specific communities. We are looking toward a grass roots revolution of rising expectations in which the priority on donor groups will be to assist and then get out of the way. ●

Kofi Annan Launches New Initiative for Girls Education Dakar Sends Strong Message of Hope

The opening session of the World Education Forum began Wednesday in Dakar, on an inspiring note with UN secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan's launch of a new United Nations global initiative to educate girls.

Mr. Annan, who delivered the keynote address at the opening session, said although some achievements, have been made with the dramatic rise in education levels in many developing countries, there is need for governments and their education partners to accelerate their efforts to fulfil the promise they made of reaching the Education for All (EFA) target which have largely not been met.

“This conference is a test for all of us who call ourselves the international community,” said Annan. “Ten years ago, in Jomtien, we set ourselves the goal of basic education for all, we are still far from achieving it.”

United Nations figures indicate that more than 880 million adults are illiterate while a quarter of a million children are out of school globally.

“These millions of children are not only being denied something many of us take for granted, they are being denied a fundamental human right spelt out in the international instruments their governments have signed on to, such as the declaration of human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the child.”

“What is more, the communities where these children live are not only being denied a future labour force of healthy, literate and employable citizens, they are being denied the foundations of development and a future place in the global economy. They are in fact being denied the future itself.”

Mr. Annan pointed out that there is still a “Yawning digital divide” between those who have access to new learning opportuni-

ties brought by the explosive technological innovations and those who have not.

For girls who account for two-thirds of children who are out of school, he said, the denial of human rights is twice over. “From issues of morality to issues of mortality, the denial of girls' rights begins in early childhood. When a choice has to be made between educating a boy or a girl, girls are more likely to be kept at home,” he said.

“When family income needs to be supplemented, girls are more likely to be sent to work. Even if girls do go to school, they will often have to do homework at the expense of homework.”

To address the imbalance, Annan said the UN system has set up a new initiative aimed at promoting the education of girls and bridging the gender gap in schools by 2005. “We need all those with the power to change things to come together in a global alliance for girls,” he said.

The initiative is also aimed at ensuring that all children, both boys and girls are able to complete their primary education by 2015.



Interview with...

Svein Osttveit

Executive Secretary of the World Education Forum

‘Concrete parametres for sustainable action’

(Continued)

Education Forum: Which regions have achieved major breakthroughs in Education For All and why are others lagging behind?

Svein Osttveit: There has been significant progress in some of the most populous countries of the world, the so-called E-9, like Bangladesh and China. Even though Sub Sahara Africa on the whole has seen little progress, countries like Uganda, Malawi and Mali can show very good results. The reasons for slow progress in other countries are basically due to the obstacles mentioned earlier (poverty, lack of political will, HIV/AIDS, conflict/civil war and population growth).

Is the fact that the goal of education has been shifted to 2015 not a collective acknowledgement of failure to meet the original target of 2000?

SO: Yes, to a certain extent this is true. But social developments everywhere are unpredictable, and responsibilities lie first of all with autonomous governments.

Another framework of action will be finalised in Dakar. In your view, what would be the new strategies and operational objectives?

SO: In very general terms, some of the core issues are definitely the following: Mobilisation of additional financial and human resources, better management, better donor co-ordination and support, respect for diversity, ensure equity.

What Parameters have you used in assessing the progress achieved and how does the Secretariat monitor activities from one forum to the other. Don't you think there is room for innovation for greater efficiency?

SO: One of the core activities of the EFA Forum has been in the field of monitoring, thus being able to see what has been achieved and where the problems are. The EFA 2000 Assessment has been particularly successful in this

respect. There is now a much better basis at country and regional levels for regularly monitoring development of educational systems. It is clear, however, that the EFA Forum should become more dynamic, more action orientated at country level with a more streamlined support mechanism at regional and international levels.

Who are the invitees for the Dakar forum. How many are they and where do they come from. How is the conference being financed?

SO: There are three main categories of invited participants to Dakar: country delegations, governmental and international organisations and representatives from civil society. We expect around 1000 participants in all. We have now more than 150 confirmed countries. The Dakar meeting is funded by a wide range of sources, the most important being bilateral donors.

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A Call for Commitment From All Partners

DAKAR, SENEGAL— Organisers of the World Forum on Education, which opened Wednesday in Dakar, Senegal, have called on all partners in Education world-wide to work together to mobilise adequate resources to ensure the attainment of education for all by 2015.

“Without education, key world problems such as environment and AIDS will not be solved, since for the long term solution to all problems is education,” said Mr. Victor Ordonez, key resource person of the Forum, and UNESCO's Director in Bangkok.

At the eve of the opening of the Forum, reporting on progress in the field of education since the last World Conference on Education held in Jomtien, Thailand, Mr. Ordonez indicated to the press that behind the good results achieved were hidden alarming information and striking disparities between rich and poor, boys and girls, rural and urban areas.

Three factors do not allow significant progress to be made: there is not enough resources to educate everyone, no adequate technological means or know-how to make things change, no political will of governments and institutions to mobilise resources and fight against disparities.

On the international consultation of NGOs on 24 and 25 April, ahead of the Dakar Forum, which expressed its dissatisfaction with the “limited number” of its representatives at this meeting, he said the forum considers education as a right for all.

Mrs Jennifer Chilawa, spokeswoman of the NGO consultation, had

stressed the joint responsibility of States in promoting education work, and called for partnership among all parties involved.

Mr. Svein Osttveit, Executive

Secretary of the Dakar Forum, said education must now go beyond the acquisition of basic skills as well as integrate use of modern technologies in education. ●



Koichiro Matsuura Director-General of UNESCO, Co-organiser of forum